Now I'm Shaking by BlueRoanSky

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Steve frowns at the drink that's shoved into his hand. It smells so strongly of alcohol, his eyes burn.

A shadow flickers at the edge of his vision.

He chugs the entire cup to oblivious cheers.

Now I'm Shaking

Author's Note:

> Part 2 of my *Get Out While You Can* series!
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> You don't have to read Part 1 in order for this one to make sense, but this part does reference Part 1 at least once.
>
> Again, not entirely a complete story, but I'm enjoying posting parts to a series rather than attempting a multi-chaptered fic. Feels like less pressure.
>
> Hope you enjoy!

Steve barely sleeps for almost a week. His parents are gone on yet another business trip, and the quiet emptiness of the house that he used to long for now crushes in on him like the suffocating closeness of the tunnels. He walks through a house almost blinding in its brightness and tries to convince himself that the growls and screams he hears are just his imagination.

Whenever he tries to sleep—on the couch downstairs with all the lights on and the TV blaring—he inevitably claws his way back to consciousness, fear choking the breath from his throat and his heart pounding so hard in his chest it hurts.

There’s really only one method guaranteed to calm the panic attacks before they progress much farther than hyperventilating.

So, when Steve ends up at the same party as Billy the Saturday night after they spent a few hours the previous Sunday watching mindless TV, Steve is too tired to keep up his usual pretenses. He idly notes a new bruise on Billy’s jaw, wonders where it came from, figures he probably already knows, and ghosts into the crowded kitchen to grab more alcohol. He doesn’t care what kind of alcohol, at this point, because he’s not even sure it’s having any kind of effect on him anymore.

“King Steve!” some guy Steve’s probably supposed to recognize yells in his ear. “Whatcha lookin’ for, man? Feel like you haven’t been around *anywhere*!”

Steve pulls at his long sleeves. “Alcohol.”

“Oh, man, you gotta try this shit, then,” the guy says, grabbing a red, plastic cup off the counter. “Some guy mixed a whole bunch of shit together and it gets you *fucked up*.”

Steve frowns at the drink that’s shoved into his hand. It smells so strongly of alcohol, his eyes burn.

A shadow flickers at the edge of his vision.

He chugs the entire cup to oblivious cheers.

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Billy’s halfway to annoyed and only partially-buzzed when the uproar from the kitchen breaks through the thumping music. He wanders over toward the noise just as Steve stumbles out of the kitchen, liquid sloshing over the rim of the red cup in his hand. His normally-styled hair is disheveled and limp, and the dark shadows underlining his eyes mirror bruises in the low light.

“Harrington,” Billy says, speaking loud over the music, “you look—” *like you need to sleep* “—fucked up.”

Steve wavers on his feet, eyes unfocused. “Maybe I am,” he says, leaning closer, “fucked up.”

Billy motions to the cup in Steve’s hand. “What’re ya drinking?”

Steve looks at his hand like he didn’t realize he was holding something. “Dunno.”

Billy pulls the cup from Steve’s loose grasp and swallows a sip, barely suppressing a cough from the burn in his throat. “Fucking shit, Harrington.”

“Hey, that’s *mine*,” Steve says, eyebrows furrowing. “That’s— You

can't just take what's *mine*."

"You don't need it," Billy says before dumping the liquid concoction on the carpet. "You should head home."

"I dunno where home is," Steve says, downcast eyes on the growing alcohol stain.

Billy sighs. "How'd you get here?" When Steve just blinks at him, Billy says, "You don't know that, either."

"That was mine," Steve says, poking the damp carpet with his shoe. "You took it."

"And I'm taking you home now." Billy grabs Steve's wrist. "Come on."

"No." Steve yanks his arm hard enough to make himself wince, but not enough to break Billy's grip. "I don't wanna."

"God, you're such a child when you're drunk," Billy mutters. "You're way too wasted to stay here unsupervised, and I don't feel like supervising."

Steve glances at his still-captured arm. "Fine. Fine, whatever. Home's fine." He pulls against Billy's hold on his arm again, so Billy lets go and follows Steve as he staggers his way outside, one hand tugging at the long sleeve of the arm Billy had grabbed. Somehow, Steve makes it to the Camaro without falling over, and he drops into the front seat with a loud sigh.

"Don't throw up in my car," Billy says as he starts the engine. "I don't need a reason to punch you."

"You're the one who's been punched," Steve mumbles, staring out the passenger side window.

Billy flinches and tightens his fingers around the steering wheel. "It —"

Steve's head falls back against the seat. "I just wanna sleep. That's why…I got drunk."

Billy snorts. “You’ll pass out for sure.” Steve doesn’t respond, so there’s silence in the Camaro until Billy pulls into Steve’s driveway. Billy gets out gracefully as Steve practically throws himself out of the car.

“You don’t gotta come in,” Steve says, as he fumbles with his keys. “’M fine.”

“Here, let me—” Billy reaches for the keys, but Steve jerks his hand away. Billy raises an eyebrow, but Steve just shoves a key into the lock.

“See? I got it,” he says, letting the door swing wide as he enters. He flips on every light switch he passes, and Billy frowns, but doesn’t comment. There’s a blanket and pillow already on the couch, and Steve flops onto it like he’s done it many times before.

Which, Billy figures, he probably has.

Billy shifts on his feet. “You gonna throw up and die in your sleep?” he asks, awkward now that Steve is already half-asleep.

“’M fine,” Steve says again without opening his eyes. “You can stay… if you want.”

Billy shoves his hands in his pockets as he deliberates. Stay with Steve, who might not hate him anymore, or go home to Neil who, if he doesn’t actually hate Billy, does a damn good job of acting like he does. “Yeah, okay.” He turns on his heel, moving to the front door. It’s when he reaches out to flip the lock that he sees the red on his fingers. Eyebrows furrowing, he examines his hand closer until he’s mostly sure that the red is, in fact, dried blood.

He glances back at Steve—passed out on the couch with every visible light turned on—and sighs. Morning will be a better time to figure out why Steve was bleeding.

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Steve wakes to a pounding headache and nausea so strong that he almost doesn’t make it to the bathroom before vomiting. He’s half-convinced he’s going to hack up his own stomach by the time he feels

not-sick enough to sit back against the wall. He catalogues his various aches: his throat, his arms, his head, his stomach. The only parts of him that don't seem to hurt are his legs, so they're automatically elevated to his Favorite Things list.

When he finally manages to stumble out of the bathroom, it's to the sight of Billy making coffee in the kitchen. Steve blinks, considers that he might be hallucinating, wonders if he'd prefer Billy being a hallucination, and then leans against the wall. "Morning?"

Billy turns around too fast, eyes wide, but his face relaxes almost instantly. "Morning, Harrington. Didn't think you'd survive your battle in the bathroom."

"Yeah, neither did— Why're you in my house?" Steve sits in one of the chairs at the kitchen table. "Did you break in or something?"

"That's a nice accusation, considering I drove your drunk ass home last night," Billy says, turning back to his coffee.

Steve frowns. "You did?" But even as the words leave his mouth, vague memories flit through his brain. "Oh. Right. Thanks."

Billy looks at him, unimpressed. "Yeah, sure thing."

Steve taps his fingers on the table. "So…"

"So, you wanna explain why I found blood on my hand after I grabbed your arm?"

Steve whips his head up fast enough to make his neck hurt. His mouth is dry when he asks, "What?"

Billy leans back against the counter, looking at the coffee cup in his hand. "I grabbed your arm because you didn't want to go home," he says, "and when I looked at my hand, there was blood on it." He looks up. "So?"

Steve slips his hand off the table, barely resisting the urge to tug his sleeve farther past his wrist. "It's nothing," he says.

Billy sips his coffee. "Uh-huh. Convincing."

Steve's lips press together. "What about you, then? How'd you get the new bruise?"

Billy turns his head to the side. "None of your fucking business, Harrington."

Steve crosses his arms. "None of your fucking business," he echoes.

Billy glares at him. "Fine." He dumps his coffee in the sink and leaves the dirty cup on the counter. "It's not like I fucking care," he says, stalking toward the front door. "Pray you didn't get any blood on my car."

His words are punctuated by his slamming of Steve's front door.

Steve doesn't even try to move. He just drops his head onto his arms on the table and groans.

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Steve spends the rest of Sunday watching TV and pretending the rest of the world doesn't exist. His headache subsides sometime in the afternoon, and he's adjusted to the occasional twinge from his arms. He doesn't eat—too nauseous and tired to bother making food—but he figures it doesn't matter since he's just hanging out on the couch all day anyway.

When he thrashes awake that night from yet another nightmare, he doesn't need to go to the bathroom for his own form of self-therapy. He drags his nails down his arms instead, ripping at the scabs until the oozing blood forces him to get up and retrieve bandages before he stains his mother's treasured couch or carpet.

After, he curls up in his blanket and watches the show or commercial or whatever that's playing on TV. He can't sleep. The Upside Down could still be out there. The Demodogs could still be searching for him.

He can't sleep, so he sits, and he watches, and he shakes until morning.